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BURNING QUESTIONS  
IN THE LIGHT OF TO-DAY





# BURNING QUESTIONS

IN THE LIGHT OF TO-DAY

THE NATURE OF THE VIRGIN-BIRTH

THE NATURE OF OUR LORD'S RESURRECTION BODY

THE NATURE OF THE ATONEMENT

THE NATURE OF INSPIRATION

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

BY THE

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"THREE BULWARKS OF THE FAITH : EVOLUTION, THE HIGHER CRITICISM,  
AND THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST"

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## PREFACE

THESE essays are published in response to a voice from the antipodes :—

“Your book, *Three Bulwarks of the Faith*, is still going the round of my *reading* friends ; and all who have read it so far have unanimously praised it, and not one of them has been content to read it only once.

“You appear to possess the peculiar faculty of tackling difficult problems, and stating them so reverently, so clearly, and so earnestly, that not only is the interest of the reader chained, but the intellect is compelled to approach matters from your own standpoint.

“I earnestly hope that, for the sake of the Church and of those who wish to understand some of the deeper problems of spiritual faith, you will go on writing.”

The article on “The Nature of the Virgin-birth,” in its original form, was rejected by no less than fifteen editors of Magazines and Reviews. “You should leave such questions

to the Universities," said one candid adviser; "or, at least, to the dignified Clergy." Feeling like a child crying out in the dark, who knows that he has something to say, but cannot get a hearing, I at length, in despair, printed it in pamphlet form, and sent a copy to a number of persons who were in a position to judge of its merits. Some of them in reply sent me very welcome notes of appreciation. Others sent me even more valuable suggestions and criticisms. Of the latter good use has been made in the course of re-writing the article for these pages. From the former, I select the following extracts :—

"It deals with the matter reverently and well. I have had ideas similar to yours concerning the process, if orthodox ideas are accepted; and on those lines these facts are the best that can be adduced. If the historical evidence were strong, I would not oppose it on scientific grounds alone."

—, *Principal of the University of* —.

"It throws new light on an intricate problem."

—, *Provost of* — *College.*

"I should think that it rightly suggests the way in which the miracle would have worked itself out."

—, *Warden of* — *College.*

"It is the first time that it has been pointed out that the assumption of the Divinity of our Lord demands scientifically the Virgin-birth. Now that you have stated it, it is quite plain."

—, *Professor of Assyriology.*

"The *tendency* is a real contribution to the question."

—, *Professor of Ecclesiastical History.*

"I have read it with great interest. The point has often interested me, but I have never seen the argument which you have adduced presented so forcibly."

—, *Professor of Divinity.*

"It is a help to us who are so deeply interested in Theological education to know that the country clergy are doing their part to meet one of the crying needs of the Church. I think and hope that your paper will do good."

—, *Professor of Divinity.*

"It is very suggestive."

—, *Professor of Hebrew.*

"The pamphlet is very timely, and I shall be glad to have it for use with enquirers. I do not see how it could be put more delicately and more lucidly. The point is of great importance."

—, *Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy.*

"You have handled a difficult subject admirably. The lucidity of your essay is worthy of Huxley."

—, *Bampton Lecturer.*

"You have treated the subject with entire reverence and great care."

—, *Bishop of* —.

"I like both the tone and the argument."

—, *Bishop*.

"Your pamphlet seems to me to meet most admirably the needs of the many who stumble at the scientific side of the question."

—, *Head Master of* — *College School*.

"For the purpose for which it was written it is excellent. To those who have once grasped the idea that there is order in the universe, it is simply inconceivable that there should be any such thing as disorderly intervention in that order. 'The world,' as a sceptical barrister said to me the other day, 'was not standing on its head nineteen hundred years ago.' Of course we have to accept many facts which appear irreconcilable with one another; but, in those matters which are beyond the use of human sight, it becomes increasingly difficult to do so. Old people become far-sighted, and have to wear spectacles in order to see clearly the things close at hand. But the old world is becoming near-sighted, and, while it sees some things close at hand with astonishing clearness, can discern things far off only as shadows which are, perhaps, unreal. You have given us a telescope."

—, *Rural Dean*.

For nearly eleven years I was Rector of a parish of 154 souls, amongst whom there was not one communicant or Churchman. A desirable living in the neighbourhood became vacant, and the employer of more than half the labour in the parish asked the patron to present me. His application was unsuccessful; and for that failure I cannot be too thankful. The successful candidate lent me a copy of Professor Robertson Smith's *Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, and thus introduced me to the study of the Higher Criticism. That study has been worth to me far more than glebe and tithes and pleasant surroundings; and I have a rich reward in knowing that the quiet musings of a country parsonage have been means of blessing to many others whose faces are unknown to me.

E. H. ARCHER-SHEPHERD.

AVENBURY VICARAGE,  
BROMYARD,  
*St. John Baptist's Day, 1906.*



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# I

## *THE NATURE OF THE VIRGIN-BIRTH*

### I

ANY inquiry into the mode of the Incarnation will be thought to border on irreverence by not a few earnest souls who believe that man's sole duty towards the things that are revealed is to bow his head and worship with veiled face. Others will disapprove through an unavowed suspicion that natural and spiritual laws are fundamentally antagonistic. But whether the inquiry be desirable or not, it has come upon us ; and there is nothing to be gained by letting judgment go by default. In the days in which we live any alleged historical fact which claims exemption from impartial investigation is "nigh unto vanishing" as an article of faith. Already there are amongst us those who deny the Virgin-birth,<sup>1</sup> whilst still professing a sincere belief in the Divinity of our Blessed Lord. Some hold that doctrinally it is of no importance, and that historically it is "not proven." Others hold that it is

<sup>1</sup> The term is used in the sense in which it occurs in current English literature, not in the wider sense in which it is used by Roman Catholic theologians.

not merely above the laws of nature, but in direct violation of them, and therefore not of God. It is argued, from Lev. xxi. 13-15, that even "Born of the Virgin Mary" may mean only that our Blessed Lord, as became the High Priest of our profession, was a "holy seed," being the firstborn of one who at the time of her marriage was "a garden shut up, a fountain sealed." Such a "non-natural" interpretation is, to say the least, not the faith of the sub-Apostolic age.

The object of this essay is to prove, for all who accept the fact of the Incarnation, that the denial of the Virgin-birth involves, apart from theological considerations, serious *scientific* improbabilities. It will be seen that the light which science throws on the mode of the Incarnation explains much in that dogma which is difficult of belief, whilst it explains nothing away. But it must be distinctly understood that no attempt is made to eliminate the miraculous, but only to put it into its right place, by showing in all reverence the *modus* of this great mystery. "The things that are revealed"—by patient observation, comparison, and experiment—"belong to us and to our children." The facts which will be adduced are matters of common knowledge ; but, so far as I am aware, no one hitherto has pointed out their true bearing on the subject in question. What I shall endeavour to explain is, when understood, so very simple, that to some there will seem to be little in it ; but, if rightly understood, it

should set at rest the question of the Virgin-birth—for all who do not deny the Incarnation, and who believe that God works by law “in heaven” as “on earth.” When the intrinsic improbability of the Virgin-birth has been removed, I anticipate that the evidence of the fact will in the end no longer be deemed insufficient. If in a question of history the value of the evidence is felt to be in inverse ratio to the improbability, it cannot be said, in the present state of New Testament criticism, that the evidence of the Virgin-birth is quite satisfactory. Hence the enhanced importance of the present undertaking. And though some may be reluctant to go all the way with me, I believe all will go far enough to admit that the Virgin-birth is not unthinkable, that it bears no contradiction in itself, and that it is not one of those things which we rightly conclude to be impossible with God.

## II

“There is no impossibility except such as involves contradiction in terms. It may be improbable that a man should walk on the water, be born without human intervention, or rise again ; but we cannot say that it is impossible for any one : we are only at the beginning of our knowledge of nature, and cannot set bounds to its possibilities.” So said Professor Huxley. But when our knowledge of nature does include full knowledge of the causes why it is contrary to general

experience for a certain thing to happen, and when there appear to be sufficient reasons for suspecting their absence in a particular case, then the antecedent improbability of its occurrence is removed. But if, in addition to this, it can be shown that normally there are inherent tendencies for that thing to happen but for the action of the preventing causes, then the possibility becomes probability. It is even so in respect of the Virgin-birth. The natural craving for motherhood for its own sake in a true woman—a craving irrespective of her mate, and into which he cannot enter, which makes the burden of a barren womb often too heavy a cross to be borne—that natural craving, I say, is but the moral expression of the unconscious physical striving of the female to reproduce her kind, unaided, by herself. She fails ultimately through inherent weakness; and—~~not to anticipate~~—there is a “strength” which is “made perfect in weakness.”

But to come to particulars. It was said of old that everything was originally produced from an egg. To-day this is true in a sense not then intended. Every living thing on earth is produced from an ovum, except in the very lowest walks of life, where reproduction takes place by means of fission. With this slight exception, everything that lives, whether plant or animal—the worm beneath the sod and man in God’s image, the lowly nettle and the giant *Wellingtonia*, the gnat and the elephant, all are reproduced in one and the same way, no matter by what name we call

the eggs or seeds from which they come. The acorn and the sparrow's egg are nearer in nature than they are in shape and size. Some ova are microscopic, and some are as large as the eggs of the extinct *æpyornis* of Madagascar, which had a cubic content of more than two gallons ; some develop into young animals before attaining an independent existence, and some not until after. The viper produces its young, which are born quite perfect, in the former manner ; but the snake in the latter, merely laying eggs, to be hatched out by the heat and moisture of some refuse-heap. The size of the ovum is no criterion of its nature, nor of its value in the scale of life ; for those of whales are not larger than fern-seed, and the human ovum is only the hundred and twenty-fifth part of an inch in diameter. Plants, no less than animals, are male and female ; and each of these sexes has its respective function. Whilst the female produces the ovum, or germ-cell (as it is called), the male produces the sperm-cell ; the function of which is to fertilize the ovum : otherwise, as a general rule, the eggs become addled or dead. This fertilization is effected in various ways. In grasses the pollen-grains are carried by the breeze to the embryo-sacs ; many flowers are fertilized by the instrumentality of insects in search of honey ; whilst to produce the luscious date the flowers of the male palm have to be cut by the hand of man, and tied or shaken amongst those of the female palm.

A cell is a unit-mass of living protoplasm. When a germ-cell and a sperm-cell of the same kind meet, if they are healthy, they coalesce, the latter (which has been characterized as highly agile, "hungry and starving") being absorbed or swallowed up by the former, which is larger, more nutritive, and comparatively quiescent. In some cases the sperm enters the microscopic ovum by a special aperture, appropriately called the micropyle. In each of these cells there is an inner nucleus, inconceivably smaller still; and fertilization of the ovum is effected by union of the nuclei. The development of the fertilized ovum begins with cell-division in the new nucleus. The nucleus divides into two parts, and these again into four; and as the process of cell-division goes on, the various parts become differentiated to form separate organs, until at length a mature offspring is produced. Generally, however, the greater part—indeed, three-quarters—of the nucleus of the ovum is extruded before the union of the nuclei. I shall have to speak later of the purpose of this waste.

We have next to consider the case of the unfertilized ovum—of the germ-cell that does not find a mate with which to become one. Here, too, in certain rare cases the process of cell-division begins, and is carried on up to a certain point; but generally the ovum is incapable of bearing the strain of fission and the loss occasioned by its actually casting off a part of itself in the process of cell-division, and so it dies.



This has been observed to occur in the ova of amphibians, of birds, and even of mammals ; and has been thought to have its analogy in certain pathological conditions in the human female.<sup>1</sup> The point where development ceases and gives place to death is not the same in all cases ; but if the latent possibilities of the ovum could be stimulated and maintained by artificial means, the process of development might be indefinitely prolonged.

Professor Loeb of Chicago University claims to have performed this feat. He has experimented on the eggs of sea-urchins, creatures which ordinarily require a male and a female parent for reproduction ; and he states that, by treating the unfertilized eggs with a solution of salts found in sea-water, he can fertilize them, and cause them to produce young. In other words, he claims to have found the way to strengthen the mother-cell, so that it can develop alone, precisely as it does naturally in still lower grades of life.

This latter process is called parthenogenesis, that is, birth from a virgin-mother. It occurs occasionally amongst plants, but it is found more frequently in the lower walks of the animal kingdom ; sometimes as the invariable rule ; sometimes only rarely, or occasionally ;

<sup>1</sup> Not infrequently the unfertilized ovum divides and attempts further development, resulting in the formation of a tumour on the ovary, containing odd scraps of the human frame—skin, hair, teeth, nails, etc. This is a frequent cause of sterility.

and sometimes at intervals interchangeably with reproduction in the normal way. If the wings of queen-bees, and of some wasps and ants, are clipped, so as to prevent the nuptial flight, the virgin-queens produce males; and so likewise do the neutral workers occasionally. About a score of moths, some flies, two or three butterflies, and one beetle are said to be examples of occasional parthenogenesis, more or less frequent. The gall-wasp produces parthenogenetically in alternate generations. The aphides are parthenogenetic for a succession of generations; sometimes for as many as fourteen, and under artificial conditions of warmth and nourishment for very many more.

Most lovers of nature are familiar with the various and sometimes very intricate devices which secure the cross-fertilization of flowers. Something very similar seems to prevail very largely in the animal world, with the effect of having prevented parthenogenesis becoming the general rule. I refer to what is known as the extrusion from the ovum of the second polar globule. This theory takes various forms in the hands of different investigators; who are more agreed as to the fact, than as to the manner, of its having hindered parthenogenesis. According to the most probable account, every ovum as a general rule is in a sense hermaphroditic, in that it contains within itself both male and female elements, termed katabolic and anabolic respectively. When the ovum has attained its mature size, the nucleus divides by (probably) normal

cell-division into two parts ; one of which, together with a small amount of protoplasm, is given off. Into the nature of this first polar globule we need not go further than to say that it is probably anabolic. Not long after, however, the nucleus which remains within the ovum repeats the process, and another tiny cell is expelled. By this second extrusion the spermatic element in the ovum is (by hypothesis) got rid of, to make way for the fertilizing sperm. But in parthenogenetic ova this second extrusion does not take place. But for this process, it is thought by some naturalists, parthenogenesis would have been the normal mode of reproduction. Other experts have spoken of parthenogenesis as "an organic ideal which has failed to realize itself." These, however, are at present only theories ; and the physical and teleological causes must not be confused with the fact of parthenogenesis itself.

It was a favourite saying with Professor Huxley, that "Science offers us much greater marvels than the miracles of Theology." The general tendency<sup>1</sup> of the female to produce offspring alone, however infinitesimal it be in the case of the higher animals, is a biological fact of great importance. That which the unfertilized ovum normally lacks, and which is supplied by fertilization, is the stimulus to begin the

<sup>1</sup> "With most of the lower animals, and even mammals, the ova show a trace of parthenogenetic power."—Darwin, *Animals and Plants under Domestication*, 2nd ed., revised, p. 352.

process of cell-division, and the strength or dynamic force to develop its vitality. There is, however, one very important limitation. In parthenogenesis the individuals produced are generally identical with the parent and with one another, unless it be in the matter of sex. If a virgin were to bring forth parthenogenetically merely by the miraculous stimulating and strengthening of the ovum in her womb, her offspring would by analogy be but a reduplication of herself. In the physical world it is only by the coming together and commingling of two different natures in the ovum that a different progeny is produced. The importance of this fact will be seen later.

### III

Let us now "loose our shoes from off our feet, for the place whereon we stand is holy ground," and may He who "bore the iniquity of our holy things" "cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit." We say that our Blessed Lord was born of a Virgin, that is, that He had no human father. But it is not for this reason that He was, in the highest sense, the Son of God. If a virgin in our day were to conceive and bear a son, that fact of itself would not make her offspring in any sense "God with us." Indeed, if under other conditions what is now the exception may become the rule, it is not inconceivable that in some sister-planet there may be beings

of various kinds, all of whom are virgin-born. It is very necessary to remember this, because it has been incautiously suggested that the Virgin-birth was simply a unique case of parthenogenesis, analogous to the "sports" and "reversions to previous types" which occasionally occur in nature.

We believe that the eternal Son of the eternal Father "took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance"; and that thus the WORD "was made man." We believe this in its full, natural meaning, and not in any limited or metaphorical sense. It is not that the Logos was the personification of God's eternal ideal of a man; or that Jesus of Nazareth was the first and only mortal to become conscious, in all its fulness, of the divine within Him. He who "was made Man" was a Divine Being, with distinct Personality, "before the world was."

We underestimate the great mystery of the Incarnation, if we think of it merely as one of the many miracles of the New Testament; for it transcends all of which we can conceive, "either in the depth or in the height above." That mystery lay in the union of Godhead and Manhood in one Person. This union took place when the blessed Virgin Mary "conceived in her womb;" which, from that moment onward until His birth, became the shrine of Him whom "the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain." But there is no reason to suppose that, after His

conception, the process of nourishment and growth, culminating at last in birth, was other than natural. On the contrary, what slight evidence there is tends to show that, having been "conceived of the Holy Ghost," He took part of flesh and blood, of the substance of His mother, in a purely natural way (Matt. i. 18 ; Luke ii. 5, 6).

Without entering upon the question of man's evolutionary origin, we may say that the human nature which our Blessed Lord assumed was that whole and perfect humanity which from the time that man first became man was (in the Divine intention and in tendency under grace) "in the image" and "after the likeness" of God. In so far as it is true that the Second Person of the Trinity was the eternal archetype of man, in so far as it is true, also, that the humanity of Jesus and the archetype of humanity were now—if we may borrow an illustration from the physical world—coincident. Substance and shadow—the Divine reality and its human likeness—the heavenly original and the earthly copy—were now one ; perfectly and inseparably one ; but the nature of neither was impaired. The union of the two natures, therefore, was not a mingling of heterogeneous elements, nor a surrender of anything essentially Divine. Nor was our Lord less human, but the more so, through the union in Him of the Divine Logos with that which is in other men only the imperfect image of the Logos. Thus our "entire" man—body,



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soul, and spirit—was taken into union with the Godhead.

Theologians have contemplated with equanimity the possibility that our laboratories may ultimately yield the secret of the origin of natural life on this planet ; but we shall never know the secret of the origin of spiritual life ; for “canst thou by searching find out God?” I shall, therefore, not attempt to define—nor shall I “darken counsel by words” which only touch the fringe of the question—the nature of the direct agency of the Holy Spirit in the miracle of the Incarnation. We “know not the way of the Spirit.” For the purpose of meeting popular objections—which unhappily are not confined to the man in the street—it is sufficient to answer, that the necessary stimulus and the power which held the human seed in life were inherent in the Divine Essence of the Logos, Who, when He “took upon Him to deliver man, did not abhor the Virgin’s womb.” On the theological side, however, we must be careful not to overlook the direct agency of “the Holy Ghost, the Lord and giver of life,” by Whom our Lord was “incarnate of the Virgin Mary.” This is a mystery beyond our powers of penetration ; and yet it touches the crux of the physiological problem. Differentiation is as essential as stimulation for the production of distinct personality. That this is rightly attributed to the Third Person of the Ever-Blessed Trinity—the Spirit Who “brooded” over the untenanted waters,



and Who is even now immanent in the law of heredity, that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" "unto the third and fourth generation"—is evidenced by the ascription to Him of even our natural endowments, talents, or gifts. "For who maketh thee to differ?" "One and the same Spirit, Who distributes His gifts to each individually as He wills."

When the Virgin asked, "How shall this be?" the angel answered, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee;" concluding with a quotation from the Old Testament, "For no word of God shall be void of power." These words are the Septuagint rendering of the saying of another angel to the Father of the faithful: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. xviii. 14). According to the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, it was "by faith" that Sarah "received strength for the production of seed." It is for this reason, since faith itself is "the gift of God," that Isaac (though begotten by Abraham) is said to have been "born after the Spirit." Faith played a like important part in the conception of the blessed Virgin Mary. Blessed indeed was "SHE WHO BELIEVED;" for through her faith there was "a fulfilment of the things which were spoken to her from the Lord." The power of the Highest ministered to her the strength to conceive; and the overshadowing Spirit was a defence against the power of death—death physical as well as death

spiritual. There may have been in the words of the angel a reference to the ninety-first psalm, which was used by the Jews as a talismanic song to ward off evil. The psalm commences with the words, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." That inner sanctuary with the overshadowing wings was now the Virgin's womb; and so "He that was begotten of God" was "kept," and "the Evil One touched Him not."

The sinlessness of Jesus, which is a truth of the utmost importance, is usually ascribed to the fact that He had no human father. This is true, on the scholastic side, with regard to the imputation of Adam's sin to his descendants. But, on the scientific side, there are the serious objections that the general heredity of the species is believed to be perpetuated primarily by the female, whilst variations are introduced by the male; and that a son frequently—some psychologists say, generally—takes after his mother's brother more than after his father. At the sinless Name of Jesus we bow our knees in humble adoration; but it is possible that we shall never know the cause of the perfect sinlessness of the Holy Child. Was it not enough that even in the womb He was "kept by the power of God"?

Our answer, then, to the Virgin's question is this: *The union of the Divine Essence with "the seed of the woman" gave to the human element the necessary stimulus and the strength or power to develop by natural*

*growth ; which union was by actual impartation of the Divine Essence of the Logos, through the direct operation of the Holy Ghost.* Indeed, we may say that the Son of God was not born of two parents, because the instrumentality of a human father was physically unnecessary. "The fruit of her womb," from the moment of His conception, had "life in Himself." It would not be correct to say that the birth of Christ was merely a miraculous case of parthenogenesis ; for that would be to leave out of consideration the essential factor of the union of the two Natures ; but parthenogenesis in the natural world furnishes us with a very real analogy to the Divine mode of operation. Thus we see that the miraculous element did not lie in the birth of a Virgin ; for that event followed naturally upon the antecedent fact of the union of the Divine nature—with deepest humility and reverence be it spoken—with that lowly cell in the Virgin's womb. From what we know of the nature and growth of the germ-cell, the marvel would have been, if, in spite of that life-giving union, He had been born in the ordinary way.

There remains a further consideration, which, however, will have no weight with those who have no sympathy with the mystical side of Christianity. It may even be interpreted adversely, on the theory that the ethical meaning was father of the fact, and that pagan superstition was the mother. The Virgin-birth is not a barren dogma, as is often alleged against

it, but is fraught with meaning for ourselves. If Christians are actually interested in all that Christ did and suffered—if we are crucified in Christ, risen in Christ, ascended in Christ, then are we also begotten in Christ; “begotten, not of bloods, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” There is life in a plant which there is not in a crystal, and there is life in an animal which there is not in a plant; even so there is life in one who is “begotten of God” which there is not in another man. All things “praise” God, when they rightly discharge the highest functions of which their natures are capable; and man, by the power of the Holy Spirit, must seek to discharge the functions of which his higher nature is capable; he must rise above the animal life to that life which is “hidden with Christ in God.” It may be only a coincidence, but it has often been pointed out with reference to the virtues which Christ taught in His gospel and exemplified in His life, that they all find their highest realization and embodiment in the female character. Hence in the apocalyptic vision we read of the body-guard of the Lamb, that “they are virgins.” What would have been the position of woman in Europe to-day, but for the ideas which centre in the Virgin-birth?

A word may be permitted as to the effect of that birth upon the Virgin Mary herself; although, like many another truth, it is capable of great abuse. There is a widespread Rabbinic belief that a woman

is without a soul until she has borne a son ; and to this there may be some allusion in the mention of "the childbearing" (1 Tim. ii. 15) in which she is to find salvation, *i.e.* to fulfil her destiny. That Rabbinic superstition, like many another, contains a grain of truth. Every woman who has borne a child is something more than the woman she was before its conception. It is often noticed how much alike in look and mind husband and wife in the course of years become. This likeness arises through her having borne children to him. There is a case on record of a white woman who bore children to a negro, and who, when she was a widow, married a white man. The first two children of the second marriage were white, but the third was coloured, and had the face and characteristics of a negro. Similar facts are well known to breeders of pedigree stock. A thoroughbred that has once given birth to a cross-bred or mongrel is quite useless ever after for the purpose of breeding thoroughbreds. The physical cause is that the blood which nourishes the young in the mother's womb through the long months of pregnancy *passes to and from the mother's heart*. Is it strange, then, that the child's nature should leave its impress on the mother's being? This fact does not justify our paying divine honours to "the mother of our Lord," but it made her "blessed among women" to "all generations."

The answer I have given to the Virgin's question

will not satisfy the man who says that nothing happens only once, nor the scientist who refuses to admit GOD as a factor in any of his thoughts; it also leaves unsolved much which is perhaps insoluble; but it should make the believer in the Incarnation hesitate before he rejects the doctrine of the Virgin-birth. I admitted unreservedly at the outset that a disbelief in this doctrine is not in practice incompatible with a sincere belief in the Divinity of Christ; but we cannot hide from ourselves that with many admirers of His teaching the denial of the Virgin-birth arises solely from the effort to get rid of the supernatural in His life and work. They would keep the casket, but throw away the jewel. They would discard Christian dogma, but retain Christian morality. But the essence of the latter is unique, in that it is a sense of responsibility arising out of communion with a *Supernatural* Person. If Christianity be less than this, it is a mere ethical system—one theory amongst many of what is best for man in a life that has no certain promise of any hereafter. A code of morals, divorced from the supernatural in Christ, might satisfy a few cultured individuals, but it would not be worth dying for. It might even be “good news” to the Pharisee, but not to the publican and sinner.

May He who “took our nature upon Him and was born of a pure Virgin,” “beget us again unto a lively hope,” and “bring us by His cross and passion unto the glory of His resurrection.”



## II

### *THE NATURE OF OUR LORD'S RESURRECTION BODY*

WHEN St. Peter and his companion, on the morning of the Resurrection, entered the empty tomb, they heard no voice of angels ; but they *saw* what convinced them that their beloved Master was risen indeed (John xx. 8). The women of their company who had preceded them saw there a vision of angels, who said to them, "He is not here ; for He is risen. Come, *see* the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell His disciples He is risen from the dead" (Matt. xxviii. 6, 7). These two incidents, taken together, suggest that there was something very unusual about the grave, the sight of which was in itself a proof of our Lord's Resurrection. What did they see ? They "beheld the linen cloths lying, and the napkin, that was upon His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself" (John xx. 6, 7). What did that mean ?

The lamented author of *Pastor Pastorum*, in his sequel to that work, *The Risen Master*, quotes with approval from a pamphlet, written more than



twenty years before, the striking statement, that "when Jesus rose from the dead, He withdrew from His grave-clothes without disturbing their arrangement; on His retiring from them, the linen clothes fell flat on the rock, because they were borne down by the hundred pounds' weight of aloes and myrrh." The late Master of Trinity Hall goes on to say, "This spice was dry; the quantity mentioned is large; and if the clothes had been unwrapped, the powdered myrrh and aloes would have fallen on the slab, or on the floor, in a very conspicuous heap." He mentions, also, that "it was the practice to anoint the body with a semi-liquid unguent such as nard. One effect of this would be to cause the powder immediately about the body to adhere to it, but the great bulk of it would remain dry."

The bringing to light of this important thought, after it had so long lain buried in a humble pamphlet, well illustrates the truth of the proverb: "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days."

But there is one important point to which I wish to take exception. The great weight of the dry spices with their huge bulk has been thought to be an exaggeration, or even to prove the unreliability of the narrative; but if we assume that the spices were mixed with ointment or nard, which was included in the weight, the difficulty entirely vanishes. But in this case the spices would not remain dry; and, as the

myrrh was a gum, the effect must have been to glue the folds of the grave-clothes together, so that they could have been removed only by peeling them off in strips—a lengthy and somewhat difficult process, which would have reduced them to shreds.

Viewed in this light, the witness of the grave-clothes becomes still more emphatic; but the aspect of what was seen by the visitors to the tomb becomes entirely changed. The unguents having hardened and glued the linen wrappings together, the latter preserved the general shape or form of the sacred Body which they had enveloped. But with the napkin it was otherwise. It was not “bound about His face,” as in the case of Lazarus (John xi. 44), but laid “upon” it. It seems to have been a simple face-cloth, such as Sir Wyke Bayliss tells us the Christians afterwards laid on the faces of their dead, painted with His image, doubtless in token that they were laid to rest in the hope of waking up after His likeness. But this face-cloth was (literally) “rolled up *into* one place apart” from the cerecloths, which apparently lay just as they had been deposited when they swathed the Lord of life. When therefore the disciples entered the tomb, what they saw was this: the cerecloths lying like a chrysalis-shell after the butterfly (Greek emblem of the soul) has gone out of it; the face-cloth being rolled up into one place apart from the rest, *to show that the sacred Body was no longer there*. Well might they say, “He is not here;”

and well might the truth flash into their minds, "He is risen from the dead."

The figure of an empty chrysalis-shell, after a butterfly has mounted aloft from it, is a beautiful idea. St. Paul makes use of another figure, no less beautiful, to express a similar thought. When a grain of wheat falls into the earth, and enters into dissolution, and springs up, all that remains of it is the outer covering or shell. Such were the cerecloths after the dead Body had been "swallowed up" of the "life-giving Spirit." In like manner shall our "mortal bodies" be "quickened through His Spirit that dwelleth in us."

No human eye witnessed—or, indeed, could have witnessed—our Lord's Resurrection; for, if He rose as His saints will rise, it took place "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." When the holy women who visited the tomb had recovered from the shock of the earthquake, they found the stone rolled away; "but Him they saw not:" He was already gone. As Bishop Gore expresses it—<sup>1</sup>

"His Body at the Resurrection was completely spiritualized—a Body in which the natural forces were completely controlled by spiritual purposes and made subordinate to them: no longer the veil or hindrance of the soul, but its completely adaptable instrument."

In consequence of the marvels resulting from the discovery of radium, physicists are now gravely asking

<sup>1</sup> In an address reported in *The Guardian*.

themselves if matter has any real existence apart from electricity. When, therefore, we have still so much to learn regarding the "natural body," it would be presumption to dogmatize regarding the "spiritual body." But with regard to our Lord's Resurrection Body we may safely say that, although it was the very Body which was laid in the grave, yet it was not raised the same Body. It had undergone the change which His brethren await, when the sons of God, who are now subject to the conditions of time and space, shall be released from this humiliation, and the sense-perception of phenomena shall give place to the more immediate knowledge which is of the spirit. The phenomenal is temporal; what remains after the veil of illusion has been rent in twain is the only reality. But when reality presents itself to the spirit, sense-perception clothes it in the garb of the phenomenal. Hence, when the Risen Lord in all the reality of His Spiritual Being appeared to the disciples, they saw Him "flesh and bone"—"this same Jesus"—clad, doubtless, in the garments He was wont to wear.

It follows from this line of reasoning that St. Paul was right in regarding his own vision of the Risen Saviour on the way to Damascus as being quite as objective as the appearances to the other Apostles. Still, there is some ground for believing that certain of his contemporaries thought that it was not, and drew in consequence a comparison unfavourable to his

claim to the Apostleship. Writing to defend himself against the insinuations of the partisans of some of the other Apostles, he says to the Corinthians (ix. 1), "Am I not an Apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" Evidently there were some who said that he was not an Apostle, like the rest; that he was not free, as they were, but subject to their authority; and that he had not seen the Risen Lord, as they had seen Him. The Greeks of Corinth were capable of appreciating the difference between the subjective appearance of an empty vision and the objective appearance to Cephas or James. That some of them denied St. Paul's claim to have seen our Lord only emphasizes the fact that they admitted the reality of His appearances to others. Moreover, when the scope of the Epistle is taken into account, it is not improbable that the mention of His having been seen by "above five hundred brethren" was intended to intimate that the vision of the Risen Lord did not, in itself and apart from the Divine commission, constitute a call to the Apostleship.

There are some who tell us that it matters little whether the Resurrection was an actual fact or not; that we have incorporated into our religious thought the moral ideas which grew out of the belief; and that the fruit, and not the root, is the main thing. Words fail me to express my contempt for this dishonourable attempt to retain the superstructure of

Christianity after it is believed the foundations have given way. I can compare it only to the conduct of a claimant to an estate who still persists in his suit, begun in good faith, after it has come to his knowledge that his title-deeds are worthless. If the ashes of Him we call our Redeemer are scattered to the winds, or are even now resting in an unknown Syrian grave, why should we delude or torment ourselves with hopes or fears of a future life? Had the disciples no further assurance that He was alive than a sense of that Spiritual Presence which we may realize in Communion with Him and with one another? I say deliberately, if the story of the grave-clothes in the empty tomb was not true, the greatest troublers of the human race were the mistaken or misguided individuals who (consciously or unconsciously) set that story going. Well did the heathen charge their deluded victims with taking the sunshine out of life for the sake of a selfish indulgence in a gloomy superstition. If Christ be not risen, the greatest benefactor of modern times was Professor Huxley, who raised Agnosticism to a Creed, by choosing that word to denote the suspension of judgment which should characterize the mental attitude of a rational being towards those deep problems of existence of which we can know nothing, either by way of Yea or of Nay, if our knowledge be limited by the range of human experience. It always pains me to hear Agnostics and Atheists spoken of in the same breath. If the



way of safety lies in the golden mean between two extremes, the position of the Agnostic between the Deist and the Atheist is logically unassailable—provided always that Christ be not risen. Such appears to have been the position of Charles Darwin. In one of his published letters he says—

“The impossibility of conceiving that this grand and wondrous universe, with our conscious selves, arose through chance, seems to me our chief argument for the existence of God; but whether this is an argument of real value, I have never been able to decide.”

Of such an one the gracious words may be true, “What I do thou knowest not now; but thou *shalt know* hereafter.” But if men “like not to retain God in their knowledge,” it will not be strange if they are “given over” to believe as they wish.

*subject*  
The ~~question~~ of the resurrection of the body is not devoid of practical interest. It really lies at the bottom of the ideal of a Christian State. Throughout the Epistles of the New Testament the duties of the Christian life are based upon the fact of our Lord's Resurrection. Before that event polygamy, concubinage, private divorce, and even slavery, had the sanction of religion. But the Christian was required to “put off” all these practices; and the “newness of life” which distinguished him from the rest of mankind, was conceived as resulting directly from the fact that “Christ was raised from the dead.” We may not find



it easy to show that the new duties grow naturally out of that fact ; but it cannot be doubted that they were supposed to do so. But if Christ be not risen, what right have we to demand that all men shall live outwardly the resurrection life, and to enforce it by Acts of Parliament? As a voluntary ideal it does not commend itself to that large section of the community which is called Society ; but as a duty of universal obligation it altogether crumbles to pieces, if the foundation on which it rests be purely imaginary. Take, for example, on this hypothesis the Christian ideal of marriage. A dead man was said to have resumed his body nineteen hundred years ago ; certain people were credulous enough to believe the story, and formed themselves in a separate community ; this community claimed to be his mystical body, and to stand to him in the relation of a bride to her husband ; this spiritual bride was theoretically one and indivisible : therefore in these days a man and a woman must remain indissolubly joined together, after they have become mutually antipathetic, until death shall mercifully part them. *Sic transit gloria ecclesiae*. So also with regard to the discipline of the body, in the belief that it will ultimately be raised from the grave, which is a characteristic feature of Christianity. Other religions may teach that there is a magical charm in asceticism ; but none of them condemn as sinful the free indulgence of any natural appetite, provided it be not coupled with imprudence, or with disregard

of the acknowledged rights of others. And St. Paul was apparently of the same opinion—if so be that Christ is not risen. In a world where the guiding principle is common sense, he could conceive of only one alternative to life in union with a risen Lord: "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

Which alternative do we choose? May our answer be: "I believe in . . . the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen."

Twilight and sunrise,  
Burden and heat of day,  
Sunset and twilight<sup>1</sup>—  
So passeth life away.  
Back in my Mother's arms  
Lay this tired clod,  
Till a fresh sunrise  
Wake me—with God.

<sup>1</sup> Life's little day is bounded by two twilights—first and second childhood.

### III

#### *THE NATURE OF THE ATONEMENT*

##### I

WHEN "the Word was made flesh," our entire nature—body, soul, and spirit—was taken into union with the Deity. The Son of God assumed that whole and perfect humanity which was "in the image" and "after the likeness" of God. The Divine Reason and the human spirit of Jesus became, as it were, coincident. Substance and shadow—the Divine Reality and its human likeness—the Heavenly Original and its earthly copy—became perfectly and inseparably one; but the nature of neither was impaired. There was no mingling of heterogeneous elements—no surrender of anything essentially human or Divine—in the union of the Divine Logos with that which in other men is only His imperfect image.

It may not be impossible, but it is certainly very difficult, to reconcile this aspect of the Incarnation with the modern theory of the Kenosis—that most disquieting doctrine based upon the questionable interpretation of a single text. It is of the essence of the Incarnation that the Divine Reason and the human spirit of Jesus were perfectly united: therefore,

whatever Divine prerogatives He may voluntarily have laid aside, when "He emptied Himself" of "the glory which He had with the Father before the world was," infallibility can scarcely have been one of them. It would follow, therefore, that our Blessed Lord cannot have been at any time mistaken in what He thought. Even on those occasions when He graciously condescended to "reason together" with His hearers from their own standpoint, it is hard to see how He could have escaped knowing the absolute truth. Moreover, there is in His utterances none of the hesitancy which generally betokens the modesty which is characteristic of a great mind when speaking on any important matter with merely *conventional* knowledge. To the multitudes He seemed to speak with authority; and the impression which His discourses leave upon our own minds, is that He spake that which He *knew*.

And yet there are attributed to Him in the Gospels several statements which not a few "discreet and learned ministers of God's Word" are unable to endorse. Such are the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the Davidic authorship of Psalm cx., the story of Jonah, the geographical position of Sheba, our ignorance of the whence and whither of the wind, the location of Hades "in the heart of the earth," together with such slips of memory or of tongue as the statements that David went "into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest," and that "Zachariah" was the "son of Barachiah."

Shall we, then, give up our belief in the Incarnation? God forbid! Rather let us give up our belief in the verbal accuracy of the Gospels. Let us acknowledge that we cannot always be quite sure that what Christ said or did happened in all respects exactly as it is recorded. According to conservative critics, more than thirty years elapsed between the death of Christ and the earliest of the four Gospels. After so long an interval the Evangelists give us their recollections of what they saw and heard, or their reminiscences of what others told them. In order that we may realize what this means, let us try to write down the first sermon which made a great impression on our minds. We may be quite clear about the ideas, but we shall express them in our own words. The ideas may have sunk down and have taken deep root in our hearts, but we shall express them in terms of our conventional knowledge. We may be able to call up a very vivid picture of the circumstances, but we shall see them in the light of all that has happened since. It was even so in the case of the Evangelists. Their recollections could not but take the form and colour of their own minds. It is seldom realized how difficult it very often is to remember quite accurately the most memorable occurrence. A notable instance is found in *The Life and Letters of Professor Huxley*.<sup>1</sup> When a certain Bishop at a public discussion asked if Darwin claimed to be descended from a monkey on his grandfather's

<sup>1</sup> Vol. i, pp. 183-187.

or on his grandmother's side, the whole audience was electrified by Professor Huxley's retort; and yet, although it was only a sentence or two, no one afterwards could remember the exact words. In no case, therefore, can we be sure that we have the very words of Christ; we do not know even what language He spoke; what we have at first hand is only His hearers' recollections after so long a time, told in their own way, of what He seemed to them to say.

But it will be said that our Blessed Lord promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit should "guide them into all the truth," and "bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever He had said to them." These words must be understood in relation to their context, of which I shall have to speak later. They do not guarantee the plenary inspiration or inerrancy of the Gospels. If the words could bear no other meaning than that which has unfortunately been read into them, we should, in the light of facts, be driven to the conclusion that they were a late reminiscence on the part of the Evangelist of what was spoken on a night of which the crowded events had manifestly left a more or less confused image on his mind. Even so conservative a critic as Canon Girdlestone admits that there are "variations in the Gospels, amounting sometimes to inconsistencies."<sup>1</sup> The rude logic of facts has made *nehushtan* of the verbal accuracy of the

<sup>1</sup> *The Churchman*, January, 1906, p. 27.

Gospels. But having said so much, it is only right to add, that their general trustworthiness has not been impaired thereby. Mr. Justice Wills says in his Legal Handbook on Circumstantial Evidence in Courts of Law—

“When the vast inherent differences in individuals . . . are duly considered, it will not be thought surprising that entire agreement *is seldom found* amongst a number of witnesses as to all the collateral incidents of the same principal event.”<sup>1</sup>

It follows that perfect accuracy “as to all the collateral incidents” is not to be demanded even of a single witness. Happily, there is no doubt as to the “principal event.” The one great fact of Christianity is Christ Himself. As a recent writer expresses it—

“In the forefront of the Christianity of the first century there stood neither ethical sermon nor metaphysical creed. Before the eyes of the world of Syrian peasants loomed, larger than anything He said, the gracious and majestic figure of a Person who attracted to Himself their hearts and minds.”<sup>2</sup>

But if we cannot rely on the verbal accuracy of the Gospels, how can we be sure that we have Christ's own words? We cannot be sure. But it does not greatly matter. Though “never man spake like this Man,” it was not to be “a teacher” that He “came

<sup>1</sup> *The Churchman*, January, 1906, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Cambridge Theological Essays.



from God" any more than it was to heal men's bodies. Apart from His declarations regarding His Own Person and work, there was nothing novel in His teaching, as recorded in the Gospels. Canon Girdlestone admits that it was "pre-Christian;"<sup>1</sup> and Jews have claimed that the Sermon on the Mount was largely a catena of quotations from the sayings of their Rabbies. In the New Testament there are twenty-one Epistles, written by not less than six different authors; and yet (with the possible exceptions of "Let not the wife depart from her husband," and "Above all things, my brethren, swear not") not one of them refers even indirectly to anything the Master said or taught. The disciples of the Rabbies never tired of quoting the *ipsissima verba* of their Masters; all followers of great men do the same. How, then, is it that we do not find in the Epistles constant reference to His sayings, like the solitary one recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, "It is more blessed to give than to receive"? Because the writers knew that there was something more important in His Person and work than even "the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth."

"Yes," it will be said, "the central fact of Christianity is the Incarnation. That event was the 'creation of a new heavens and a new earth.' It raised the human race above its former level as much as 'the Breath of Life' raised Adam above the brutes." But

<sup>1</sup> *The Churchman*, January, 1906, p. 26.

where is the evidence that this is so? Wherein does the nominal Christian—the average man who spends Sunday on the river—differ from the average Shintoist, Buddhist, or Mahommedan of equal civilization and culture? and wherein do they differ from the educated Greeks or Romans before the birth of Christ? There has appeared, indeed, “a new creation” upon the earth; but it is the Mystical Body of Christ—the men who have been brought into personal union with Him, and to whom He has “given power to become sons of God,” even those “who believe on His Name.” The Incarnation—fundamental truth as it is—does not occupy the foremost place in the Epistles. It is stated amply and explicitly, beyond the possibility of doubt; but it is a fact very little dwelt upon. It is taken for granted everywhere, rather than stated often. Like the doctrine of the Trinity, it is an underlying thought rather than the burden of the Gospel message.

But there *is* one truth which every writer of an Epistle (except the brethren of the Lord, who were slowest to imbibe the “new wine” of Christianity) states again and again, and which is the burden of their message on almost every page. That truth is not the Fatherhood of God, nor the Brotherhood of man, but the Atonement which was wrought out by the death of Christ. It is now the fashion to attribute every unpopular Christian dogma to St. Paul, but that truth is not distinctively Pauline. St. Peter, St. John,

and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews directly state it, and dwell upon it, no less than St. Paul. It is the unique truth, the distinguishing feature, and the animating principle, of their Christianity. That truth our Church, at the most solemn moment of our experience, has thus gathered up, in fewest words of deepest meaning—

“JESUS CHRIST . . . UPON THE CROSS . . . MADE THERE (BY HIS ONE OBLATION OF HIMSELF ONCE OFFERED) A FULL, PERFECT, AND SUFFICIENT SACRIFICE, OBLATION, AND SATISFACTION, FOR THE SINS OF THE WHOLE WORLD.”

No other words better express the belief, and the main ground of confidence, of every generation of Christians. Religion and piety have presented our Blessed Redeemer to the contemplation of the faithful under many symbols ; but every age (except our own) has loved best to think of Him either as “the Good Shepherd” who “giveth His life for the sheep,” or as Himself the *Agnus Dei*—“the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.”

## II

We are told, with perfect truth, that the Jewish custom of sacrifice had its origin in dense heathen superstition ; and that the conception of expiation with which the New Testament has made us familiar

did not become pronounced in the Jewish idea of sacrifice until exilic or post-exilic times. Must our religious thought, it is asked, be dominated for ever by the ideas of Ezra and Ezekiel, from which the early Christians, through their Jewish associations, were unable to shake themselves free?

Now surely we have forgotten all that Evolution once taught us. Man himself, made in God's image, has his ancestry amongst the lowly newts and worms; and the water-lily, the glory of our ponds, has her roots

“Deep down in blackest slime, festering, foul.”

Is it strange, then, that in our holy religion there was likewise a “day of small things”? If the true history of the idea of sacrifice were inverted, I know not how that idea could be justified on the ground of natural development.

But Evolution has taught us another truth, of equal importance, namely, that it is only out of the best and healthiest of its kind that something higher is evolved. Christianity is no fungus-growth on rotten vegetation. It is a natural, higher development, not a parasitic growth on a degenerate stock. The Apostles did not say, “The whole priestly ideal of expiation is wrong. God is love. He delighteth not in sacrifices and offerings. Let us go back to the earlier prophetic ideal of truth and righteousness.” It is thus Christ should have instructed them, according to that “strangest

thing in the world—the Gospel with the Gospel omitted.” But He declared that the purpose of His coming was “not to destroy, but to fulfil, the law”—not to abolish, but to bring it to completeness—and “to give His life a ransom for many.” This was the great truth, so hard of apprehension, into which the Comforter was to guide the sorrowing disciples after their Lord was gone from their eyes, and which they would remember He had circumstantially foretold while He was still with them in the body. And what they said in effect was, “Now that the substance has come, the shadow is empty. God has honoured His signature by paying the draft on the earthly tabernacle in the golden coin of heaven.” It may please us to say that that signature was forged; but we cannot deny that they who held the paper-token accepted it in good faith: and, blessed be God! “they were not disappointed of their hope.”

As all things are of God by Evolution, so God did not evolve the sin-offering without a purpose. The contrary view arises from a false historical standpoint—from the failure to perceive the true line of development of Old Testament revelation. For the Priests’ Code—the laws of altar and priest and sacrifice—was, in point both of time and of importance, the climax and keystone of the Mosaic law. God, Who of old time spoke in divers measures to the Jewish race in the prophets, spoke almost last of all in the *Torah* of the priests before speaking to us in His Son. Between

the priests' *Torah* and the Gospel there is little of primary importance except the Psalter; and the Psalter and the priests' *Torah* are largely due to the same body of men. If Old Testament revelation had stopped short with the work of the prophets, there would have been no place in history for Christianity. For the Gospel message is not, "Cease to do evil, learn to do well." It is not even, "Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God." It is a message which tells of "remission of sins"—of remission through a sin-offering, which looked both Godward and manward. The writings of the prophets are interspersed with Messianic hopes more or less bright; but the Levitical law might be described as a diagnosis of the human malady, sin, and a forecast of God's remedy, the Atonement. Deliverance from sin is the thought which is most prominent in the name by which our Lord is most commonly known—the Saviour. It was "for us men and for our salvation" that He "came down from heaven." Every time we bow our knees at the Name of JESUS, we confess that the purpose of His Incarnation was to "save His people from their sins." The Incarnation was to the Atonement as a means to an end; for, in taking our nature upon Him, "He was made a little lower than the angels," in order "that by the grace of God He" might "taste death for every man" (Heb. ii. 9). The Church of Rome has emphasized this truth, in giving the first place among



theologians to Thomas Aquinas, its great exponent. Jewish tradition, then, was right after all in assigning to the Law the place of highest importance in the Hebrew canon. And that importance is not lessened by the fact that the "statutes and judgments" which Ezra taught in Israel (Ezra vii. 10) are incorporated with the laws of his predecessor Moses, upon which they are founded. God made the Law in virtue and effect what it was believed to be in fact. He dealt with it as He dealt with the rite of baptism or of circumcision. He took old customs of man's device, and gave them a new, spiritual meaning. In a land where *adoption* was commonly practised He laid His Fatherly hand upon Ezra's law-book, and made it His. The one altar and the one priesthood, which emerged out of the stress of centuries, made possible the work of Christ.

"Offered was He for greatest and for least,  
Himself the offering and Himself the priest ;"

but the mystery of His death became clear only in the light of the book of Leviticus. God used the ritual law, not merely to portray beforehand, but also to display afterwards, the nature and purpose of the death of Christ. Well, therefore, did St. Paul ardently desire that his converts might have the gift of prophecy, since in the early Church prophecy was largely exercised about old-time shadows and promises, whereby it was gradually seen that every natural hope and



aspiration under the old covenant found its realization in Christ and His atoning work. Herein most of all lies the permanent value of the Old Testament. We may be unable to admit into our scheme of interpretation the existence of direct Messianic prophecy; even the birthplace at Bethlehem, and the recall from Egypt, and the riding into Jerusalem on an ass—although true historically—may seem to us only felicitous adaptations of scriptural metaphors; but we cannot deny that the old dispensation was a preparation for the new. And the *motive* of the old is continued in the new. The prodigal's return is welcomed with "music and dancing;" but the "dancing" of the Gospel is to the "music" of the Law.

The cause why the New Testament doctrine of the Atonement is so much disliked, is in large measure to be found in the immoral ideas which have been read into it—ideas which are worthy of the heathen who smeared their idols with human blood. The New Testament writers throw little light on the nature of the Atonement. They state the fact unequivocally; and with that they are content. They deny the popular belief that "the blood of bulls and of goats" could really "take away sins" (Heb. x. 4); but they do not explain how "the precious blood of Christ" availed to that end. And yet the spirit of the age demands that we should endeavour to justify this belief in our reason.

"There are nineteen different ways" of explaining

the Atonement, "and they are all wrong." I should not venture to suggest another, which may

" but add one more  
To a long list of failures,"

were it not that every wrong solution, if it takes account of all preceding attempts at solution, brings us one step nearer to the truth. As the tendency of knowledge is towards the recognition of unity in creation, and as the Atonement is of the essence of the Divine scheme in creation, its *raison d'être* is probably to be found in the secret of the origin of all created things. Now, we are familiar with the philosophical idea that the universe is the expression and embodiment of WILL. "Things which are seen" are not the outcome of Abstract Necessity, but of Free Will. And not only is there a purpose in all that is; but all things are, because the Almighty, by an ever-living "word," willed that they should become, and should continue, and that their end should be wrapped up in their beginning. Before all time "He gave to the Son to have life in Himself" (John v. 26); but of all things created it is said, with reference to the Son, that they are "upheld by the word of His power" (Heb. i. 3), and that "in Him all things consist" (Col. i. 17). Starting, then, from this idea, that the ever-present operation of the Divine Will is the Prime Cause of all created things, may not the essence of the Atonement lie, strictly speaking, not so much in the

perfect life which culminated in the shameful death upon the cross, nor even in the actual death itself, but in the WILL of the Deity to stoop to that extremity for the sake of His creatures? We are only just beginning to learn, and have as yet but a faint idea of what mighty possibilities lie in the will. Human self-sacrifice has often worked wonders; but what has proved effectual has generally been not so much the actual deed as the will to go to the length of the deed. In all such cases "the will" *is* "the deed." What is "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man," which removes mountains and heals both soul and body, but the actual expenditure of will-power in accordance, or rather in co-operation, with the Will of God? ("Lord, teach us to pray!") It seems to be an established fact that the will of one man can in some mysterious way draw another to him from the ends of the earth, or influence his actions at that distance, if the latter has but voluntarily submitted himself to the power of the other's control. ("From the malice of our ghostly enemy, good Lord, deliver us!") Certainly the will is "five-fifths" of moral character, so that it has been said, "The will is the man." Mere surrender of the will, or resignation, is a potent natural virtue; but voluntary self-sacrifice is the highest Christian grace. And this mysterious power of the will does not seem to be limited to rational beings. Who can say but that the will of animals to be mistaken for their surroundings has

been the prime factor in their coloration? If so much power be latent in the will of the creature—that spark from the Divine anvil—what may not be possible to the fathomless self-sacrifice of the Will by which “all things consist”? If it had been possible for the Divine Will to be over-ruled—if I may so speak without irreverence—the Will of the Son of God to die might have sufficed for our redemption without His actual death. But when He said, “Lo, I come, to do Thy Will, O God,” there was no greater to interpose, as in the sacrifice of Isaac, and therefore the Divine Will was fulfilled in action. But it must be clearly understood that *Will* is something very different from mere passive *willingness*. The Will of which I speak was the intervention of a new, ever-active *force* into that universe which His Will had made and still upholds. He was “the Lamb that hath been slain from the foundation of the world.” I throw out this thought only as a suggestion. When we are able to understand how the action of the Divine Will “made us and all the world,” it is possible that we shall be able to understand also how the action of the Divine Will “redeemed us and all mankind.” We know, indeed, that “the Will of God” is our “sanctification,” and that “it is God who worketh in us to will.” Thus it is probable that our creation, redemption, and sanctification, which are severally ascribed to the Three Persons of the Ever-Blessed Trinity, are inseparably interwoven in one efficient Will, forasmuch as “God is One.”

In a death by crucifixion there is undoubtedly some shedding of blood ; but death does not supervene from loss of blood—would to God it did !—but from unspeakable torture. When, therefore, it is said that we are saved by the blood of Christ, the meaning is that we are saved by His death, of which the blood sprinkled on or towards the altar was a type and pledge. Indeed, we may take it that, whenever the blood of Christ is mentioned in Holy Scripture, either the blood is used as a figure to denote His death, or there is at least an implicit reference to the blood of animal sacrifices, which were a sacrament of His death. Thus, for an example, in the well-known text—so precious to the pilgrim-saint who is conscious of his own many failings—“ If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship One with Another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin ” (1 John i. 7), we miss the full meaning if we do not see a reference to the water of the ashes of the red heifer, which, when sprinkled, cleansed the members of the holy congregation of Israel from the defilements which they inevitably contracted through death in their wilderness journey (Num. xix.). As a matter of fact, “ without shedding of blood there ” was “ no remission ” under the Levitical law, because the Jews invariably slaughtered by the shedding of blood ; and therefore blood shed was to them the evidence of life taken. In some Semitic tribes, however, the victim died by strangulation, instead of by the sacrificial

knife. If it had not been unlawful for the Jews "to put any man to death," our Blessed Lord would have been stoned to death by the Sanhedrim. If He had been pleased to be "cut off" in that more merciful way, we dare not say that His death would not have been a "sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world." But, in that case, His death would not have touched the lowest depths of degradation. "The shame" of the cross was, if possible, more pronounced even than its pain. He voluntarily "drunk the *dregs* of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out," when, in "pouring out His soul unto death," He was "satisfied" to be "numbered with the transgressors." If His sacrifice had not been voluntary, He could never have drunk that cup. We may thank God, who never utterly forsakes the righteous, that Christ's Will to die must, amid all His degradation and pain, have brought to Him a comfort in dying.

### III

But what need was there for any atonement? Why could not an Almighty God of love have freely forgiven His children upon their repentance—nay, without any repentance, even as He has told us to forgive our enemies?

With regard to this illustration I may say that the reason why we are to forgive our enemies is that



Christ "hath once suffered for sins," amongst which are the injuries our enemies have done us ; and, therefore, not to forgive them is to reject His Atonement on their behalf. As to God's character and attributes, which were believed of old to be inherent in His name, He is what He is (Ex. iii. 14), not what we in our changing moods think or wish Him to be. When it suits their purpose, sceptics argue as though it were unquestionable that, *if* there be a God, He *must* be a God of love. Whence do they learn that ? Not from Nature : she is "red in tooth and claw." Not from history, for

"The world is full of groanings of the dying,  
And mournings for the dead."

"I beheld the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter ; and on the side of their oppressors there was power ; but they had no comforter." Not from individual Providence ; for, apart from revelation, we might just as well speak of capricious Fortune, or of blind Fate, as the bestower of good. Even to the Hebrew Seer He appeared as a Being righteous, terrible, and jealous. It is only in the light of the Cross that He is seen to be love. And as to His being Almighty, it is necessary to understand clearly what we mean by that word. God is Almighty in the sense that no possibility is beyond His power. But there is one thing at least which it is not possible for Him to do : He cannot make what *is*



to have never been. It may be possible to annihilate matter, but not facts. Sins are facts ; and all facts have consequences. As is said in the first twin-verses of the *Dhammapada*—

“ All that we are is the result of what we have thought : it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage.

“ All that we are is the result of what we have thought : it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him.”

Another verse says—

“ Not in the sky, not in the midst of the sea, nor if we enter into the clefts of the mountains, is there known a spot in the whole world where a man might be freed from an evil deed.”

This Buddhist doctrine is the creed of natural science. Edward Clodd says in *The Story of Creation*—

“ Nothing—not Omnipotence itself—can step in between us and the consequences of our acts. The forgiveness of which men talk shows the charity of the injured, and may win the wrong-doer to a better life ; but the thing forgiven—who can undo its effects ? Our deeds are like the children born to us—they live and act apart from our own will. Nay, children may be strangled, but deeds never.”

If the highest conception of Greek art at its best

has any message for ourselves, it proclaims the same truth. Ruskin says in *The Queen of the Air*—

“And now, going back to the myth of Athena, we see that, though she is first a warrior maid, she detests war for its own sake ; . . . in justice only she judges and makes war. But in this war of hers she is wholly implacable. She has little notion of converting criminals. There is no faculty of mercy in her when she has been resisted. Her word is only ‘I will mock when your fear cometh.’ Note the words that follow : ‘when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind,’ for her wrath is of irresistible tempest ; once raised, it is blind and deaf—rabies—madness of anger—darkness of the *Dies Irae*. And that is, indeed, the sorrowfullest fact we have to know about our own several lives. Wisdom never forgives. Whatever resistance we have offered to her law, she avenges for ever—the lost hour can never be redeemed, and the accomplished wrong never atoned for. The best that can be done afterwards, but for that, had been better ; the falsest of all the cries of peace, where there is no peace, is that of the pardon of sin, as the mob expect it. Wisdom can ‘put away’ sin, but she cannot pardon it ; and she is apt, in her haste, to put away the sinner as well, when the black aegis is on her breast.”

All this is fearfully true in the natural world. But “Omnipotence” did “step in between us and the consequences of our acts,” to separate between “a man” and his “shadow,” and to “put away sin” without “putting away the sinner as well.” God willed ; and the cross on Calvary was the expression of His Will. He said in effect, “I Myself will suffer

for the ills done by the creatures I have made." Thus He took upon Himself "the iniquities of us all." But the fact that the thinkers of the East and the observers of the West should alike deem any intervention impossible confirms the truth that no slight remedy would have been sufficient to cure the evil which has its seat in the corruption and depravity of the will.

In a village church the setting sun shone through the west window, and in front of it kneeled a little servant-maid, with the face of a child-angel. As I gave the Blessing I thought with myself, "If there is so much of glory and beauty in a clod of earth, who shall say what more God may not do for those on whom He has already bestowed so much?" Creation being granted, we need scarcely wonder at redemption; for when marvels begin, who shall say where they shall end? When we say that our poor little world was beneath the notice of the great God, we make Him as unlike our better selves as possible. We forget that, when the king loves the beggar-maid,<sup>1</sup> he does not scruple to stoop to her level, in order to set her worthily on the throne beside him. The beggar-maid may well marvel that she, of all maidens, should be the chosen; but the fact that the king has set his love upon her makes her precious in herself. "This is a great mystery;" but it is not a mere figure of speech. Christ won the Church, through His own

<sup>1</sup> This idea is worked out with great beauty in Ezek. xvi. 6-14. Compare Rev. xxi. 9, 10.

life-blood, to be His Bride. "The Lord had need of" us; and to reject His love is to "*grieve* the Holy Spirit of God." It would seem almost as if it were in the power of the creature to make the Creator "blessed." Those who have the capacity to receive a large measure of His love can testify to the reality of this relationship. They perceive His presence with them, closer than that of any unseen earthly friend, and hold communion with Him as in very truth the "Lover of their souls." A poor charwoman said to me, "I have only to shut my eyes, and I feel, as it were, His breath upon my cheek; I open them, and He is still there."

Of course this is anthropomorphism; but it is anthropomorphism of the right kind. Anthropomorphism not only pervades Holy Scripture, but is at the very foundation of our religious belief. I cannot illustrate this better than by quoting from a recent review of Haeckel's *Last Word*—

"Science deals with observed facts and with their observed or inferred conditions; it knows nothing whatever concerning their cause or *raison d'être*. There are, however, still thinkers, who are neither knaves nor fools, but who none the less believe that a *raison d'être* exists, and may be a subject of rational enquiry. Some of us feel that empirical science does not satisfy the whole being of man. We postulate a cause of which evolution is an expression. Since the process appears to us to be of a rational order, we regard it as a manifestation of underlying reason. And

since we can only think of reason in terms of our own experience, we regard it as of the personal order.”<sup>1</sup>

“No man hath seen God at any time : the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father”—the Logos, the Divine Reason, the Archetype of perfect Man—“He hath declared Him.”

<sup>1</sup> *The Tribune*, February 10, 1906.

## IV

### THE NATURE OF INSPIRATION

#### I

IT is a principle of all scientific enquiry, that we should never assume more than is necessary to account for all the facts of the case or matter under consideration. This principle applies in theology, which is the oldest of the sciences ; forasmuch as God is economical in His working, and never does by a miracle what ordinary means are adequate to accomplish. And where the evolutionary process has plainly been at work, it is safe to assume the absence of miraculous intervention. Where the growth is natural, life must be inherent in the organism. The more we know of the works of God, the more cause have we for believing that His general mode of operation is by a process of natural development.

The Church Catholic has committed herself to the doctrine that the Holy Ghost "spake by the prophets." It follows from this statement that there were of old inspired *prophets*, and that there was an inspired *message* ; but it does not follow that there was ever an

inspired *book*. The prophecies were originally *oral* messages from God to His people. The fact that some of them were afterwards written down and collected together, and finally edited, does not of necessity make the *record* of them inspired. Neither is Inspiration necessarily implied in the epithet "holy" which is applied to the Scriptures. They are holy, *i.e.* marked off or separated from other writings, in respect of their subject-matter and in respect of their use.

It is now the custom of the man in the street to speak of the Bible as a book that has been found out. The almost revolutionary discoveries of modern science and history are cried aloud on the housetops, and he is quick to perceive that they are utterly inconsistent with the traditional views which he learned in the Sunday school. Having there been taught to regard the Bible as all "gold, tried in the fire," he now refuses to admit of it that there is precious metal in its native quartz, and says that it is all dross. If, therefore, we would continue to use the Bible profitably for instruction, we must get rid of the careless habit of speaking of it as an inspired book, when in reality all that we mean by the expression is that it contains God's inspired word or message.

The time has come when we must admit frankly, that there is incorporated in Holy Scripture much that was in its origin only myth and legend and fragmentary folk-lore. It is probable that the whole of the first eleven chapters of Genesis and a great part



of the succeeding chapters fall under this description. Why should we start back in horror from the thought? If God makes light to shine out of darkness, why should He not make myth and legend the vehicles of His message? "What is a myth but a parable?" And why may not a legend be "an allegory" of Divine instruction? Myths and legends were well adapted to carry a message from God to the men who believed them; nay, more, they may now carry other and higher messages to us who know their origin. This latter truth may be illustrated by the following fact. The by-products of uranium are more valuable than that metal itself. They once lay in despised heaps; but they are now being worked over for the extraction of radium, an ounce of which is worth three-quarters of a million sterling. In like manner, there is a hidden value in the Bible besides the original meaning. Thus, the story of the Fall, like the narrative of the giving of the law at Sinai, sums up for us in a single scene what was really the result of a long process.<sup>1</sup> The beginnings of revealed truth were "small as a grain of mustard seed;" and in some of the records which contain them there is much from which the moral perception of a later age revolts. But those things which now seem to us unworthy of God were not only far in advance of the conceptions which they superseded, but were doubtless necessary

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<sup>1</sup> In the Essay "Evolution and the Fall of man" in my *Three Bulwarks of the Faith* I have endeavoured to sketch this process.

links in the progressive revelation of perfect holiness and truth. On many subjects it is impossible for an earthly father to tell his children the absolute truth, for the simple reason that they could not understand it. He therefore does not dispel their childish fancies, but rather makes use of them. Choosing words which are relatively true, that is to say, true from *their* point of view, he unfolds to the minds of his little ones just so much of the truth as they are able to bear. And when he would teach them moral truths, he does it very largely by means of story and fable. It is thus that "a father pitieth his own children;" and it was thus that God dealt with the Jewish race in the infancy of revealed religion. He took the myths and folk-lore of a former age, and breathed into them a Divine message, purifying them in the process. Was not this Inspiration indeed?

To many minds it is inconceivable that there should at any time have come from God, however indirectly, anything but the absolute truth. But theory must give place to fact. To the earlier prophets of Israel it did not seem inconceivable that God should have told His servant to act a lie.

"And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from being king over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Beth-lehemite: for I have provided Me a king among his sons. And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the Lord said, Take an

heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord." <sup>1</sup>

Can we conceive anything further from the teaching of our Lord, "Let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay"? Here, according to the prophetic narrative, is Samuel, the traditional founder of the prophetic order, acting deceitfully towards Saul, in word and deed, at the Divine command! We do not get rid of the difficulty by saying, God's sovereignty is absolute. The whole incident is what we should call a stratagem in war, and a lie in private life. It has been freely quoted to justify what is now to us the abominable doctrine, that the end sanctifies the means. And here by the way let me say that, whenever we read of such colloquies between God and man, we must remember, in order to understand them rightly, that, as "no man hath seen God at any time," neither hath any man "heard His voice." It is only by the eyes and ears of the soul that God's revelation is ever apprehended; and the purest light which beams from Him is like that of the sun, which is affected by the nature of the medium through which it passes.

It must be admitted that this view of Inspiration is not that which the Scriptures, *as generally interpreted*, give of themselves. For my own part, I am not concerned to prove that the general interpretation is wrong. If St. Paul had been asked what Scripture was "inspired of God," I think he would have

<sup>1</sup> 1 Sam. xvi. 1, 2.

answered, "All Scripture." I think, also, he would have maintained that "holy men of old were moved by the Holy Ghost" in all that they spake or wrote of Holy Writ, including their transcriptions from secular sources. He would have said, "Thy Word is true from the beginning, and in it is no darkness—no error—at all." His views may have been indefinite upon the contents of the Hebrew canon; but "Thus saith the Lord" from any accepted Scripture would have been for him "an end of all strife" in any matter historical or scientific.<sup>1</sup>

Such was the conventional belief of his day. It would have been little less than supernatural if he had risen above it. The nature and extent of Inspiration was a matter on which it had not yet pleased God to enlighten the minds of His people.

So far as we are able to form an opinion from the little that is recorded in the Gospels, our Blessed Lord condescended to meet the Jews on their own ground, when He argued with them out of their own Scriptures. But it is not always that we can be quite sure of His exact words, but only of what He seemed to His hearers to say. The peculiar expression, "Is it not written in *your* law," introducing a quotation from the Psalms, has always seemed to me to intimate that He regarded the Hebrew canon from a height above the standpoint of His hearers. But He distinctly taught

<sup>1</sup> I think it more honest to confess this plainly, if somewhat bluntly, than to rest the case on an alternative rendering of a text (2 Tim. iii. 16).

His disciples that His Passion and Resurrection were foretold or foreshadowed in the Scriptures. As His death and rising again is the central fact of Christianity, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." To this fact we bear witness in the Creed: "He suffered and was buried, and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures." This article does not make any pronouncement on the much-debated question, whether there are any distinct Messianic predictions in the Old Testament; but it recognizes the general fact, that the highest hopes and expectations which were Divinely awakened and fostered under the Law and the Prophets found their final realization in Him; though in a manner "exceeding abundantly above" anything that it had entered into the heart of man to "ask or think." Christ in His own Person summed up the conflict between light and darkness, which came to a head in Him; and therefore every partial victory of truth and righteousness under the old dispensation was a prophecy of His final and complete triumph. For this reason, where the circumstances are parallel, every historical incident in the Old Testament may legitimately be taken as typical of Christ and of those who were "with" Him or "against" Him. Thus He is at once the "persecuted, poor, helpless Man" of the Psalms, and the King who "sees his desire upon all his enemies."

## II

Not only do we need to get rid of the idea that the Bible is an inspired book, with God for its author, in the sense in which the Koran claims to be ; we need also to dispossess our minds of the idea that Inspiration is necessarily a supernatural process. When our Blessed Lord said to St. Peter, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven," He referred to a process in which there was nothing supernatural, though much that was superhuman. Spiritual processes are no less natural than physical phenomena ; for, equally with the latter, they are subject to law. And it is sometimes given to us to see the working of natural laws in the spiritual world. Although we cannot say when the sun of God's revelation first rose upon the human horizon, we can trace the upward course of that "light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

For us, as Christians, the history of revelation begins with the Divine choice of the nation of Israel and its Providential settlement in the land of Canaan. We see at work the first rude machinery of God's mill for grinding out truth—that bread by which the soul of man lives—in the schools of the prophets. If these schools, as some believe, were an institution borrowed from the heathen Canaanites, we have here an illustration of the proverb, "One soweth, and another reapeth,"



and we are now reaping that whereon others laboured whose memory we despise. But it will be enough to look at the picture of "Saul among the prophets" (1 Sam. ix.-x. 13; xix. 19-24), in order to trace the prophetic word to its source. The questions which a "man of God" was then expected to answer were such as would be put to a "white witch" in our own day, *e.g.* what had become of strayed animals; and his services were thought to be adequately rewarded by the gift of a piece of bread or of a small coin. The prophets, who lived in a community, went in procession, with instruments of music; and, whilst their leader stood as head over them, they worked themselves up into a frenzy, so that they stripped off their clothes, and fell down insensible, and lay all night naked on the ground. Such was prophesying once; and similar religious exercises may still be seen as survivals in the same land. From such small beginnings did the Word of God spring. Let us ever beware of "despising the day of small things."

When God makes choice of a man as an honoured instrument in His hands for declaring His Will, He does not transform him into a being of a later age; but He makes use of the powers and faculties of the man as he is. Whoever with a simple faith and a pure motive seeks the Divine guidance and direction, not only assuredly finds it, but finds it where and how he seeks for it. Thus, the man who believed that God spake in dreams and in visions of the night, and



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who listened to hear what the Lord God would say to him, did not listen in vain. To such a man dreams and visions were in very truth God's "angels" or messengers; and they would be as much to us still, if we had as much faith and as little knowledge. Dreams and visions, the use of teraphim, the "voice from heaven," and the casting of the lot, were once amongst the normal modes of God's revelation; though a time inevitably came when they were more or less discredited through the abuses which were inseparably connected with them. It was otherwise with the gift of prophecy, which shone more and more unto the perfect day. From such an expression as "the word of the Lord came unto me," or, "the spirit of the Lord came upon me," we should naturally expect, when we remember what was the atmosphere of the schools of the prophets, that the impartation of the Divine message to a prophet was at times attended with considerable elevation of spirit. It would not be incorrect to say that a Divine afflatus rested upon him, which sometimes lifted him out of his normal self, and perhaps not infrequently was attended with much excitement and not a little extravagance. The experiences of modern Revivals show that the undoubted presence of the Spirit is not incompatible with much that to sober minds appears disgraceful, and even painful to contemplate. "The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before" those whose natures and conduct are cold and correct.

But it would not always be so. The Lord would not always be in the hurricane, or in the earthquake, or in the fire. As time went on, He would be more often in the "still small voice;" and "in quietness and confidence" would be the prophet's "strength." When we come to the New Testament, and especially to St. Paul's Epistles, it would seem as though Inspiration were but God-illuminated Reason. God there speaks through the sanctified intellect of the Apostle, as often before in the Old Testament He had spoken through the emotional nature of the prophets.

How different from the sober reasoning of the Apostle is the following action of a prophet:—

"And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said unto his fellow by the word of the Lord, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man refused to smite him. Then said he unto him, Because thou hast not obeyed the voice of the Lord, behold, as soon as thou art departed from me, a lion shall slay thee. And as soon as he was departed from him, a lion found him, and slew him." <sup>1</sup>

Viewed from our intellectual standpoint, this story, whether it be true or false, seems little less than immoral. Apart from the unreasonableness of the demand and the arbitrary injustice of the sentence, it utterly ignores the right of the State over the person of the subject. But morality itself is a relative term;

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings xx. 35, 36.

and the morality of an age in which the emotions had almost unrestricted sway becomes immorality to those whose minds have been enlightened by a right use of their reason. Our emotions are of God ; our "reins" which "chasten" us "in the night season" are His handiwork ; but reason is His last and highest natural gift, being the attribute of the "image" of the Divine Logos. Hence it happens, that the more the reason is illumined by the Holy Spirit, the higher is the revelation. The seer on his watch-tower may be compared to the astronomer in his observatory, whose work largely consists in revising the observations of those into whose labours he has entered. Does it not behove us, therefore, in dependence upon God's grace, to bring His earlier revelations to the bar of Reason, in order that by His help we may correct in them what now seems to be amiss through the preponderant sway of the emotions over the minds of those who spoke in His name ? Truth in time ceases to be truth, through the superabundant light of later revelation. Thus it happens that many of the errors of to-day were God's truths of yesterday. "When that which is perfect has come, that which is imperfect shall be done away ;" though we shall never know absolute perfection, until "in Thy Light we see light."

God's earlier revelations of Himself seem to have been addressed mainly to the emotional side of man—that side of human nature to which religion most powerfully appeals in the case of most women and

children. Israel was His purchased slave or His affianced wife ; and He was to them merely as a good and righteous lord. Christ himself treated His Apostles as friends ; and what bound them most closely to Him was the cord of their affections. Not until He had gone on high, and had sent them the gift of the Holy Spirit, did knowledge after the flesh give way to the higher knowledge after the Spirit. The contrast between God's dealing with man in the earlier prophets and His dealing in St. Paul's Epistles is as great as the contrast between the way a father deals with his little child and the way in which a professor seeks to train his disciples. Nor until the Gospel took possession of the fruits of Greek thought and culture, largely in the person of Saul of Tarsus, did the Comforter become the Teacher to discipline and enlighten the mind and understanding. And the Spirit still dwells in us and walks in us, according to the Divine promise ; not, indeed, in any one individual, but in the Church as an organic whole ; and He will ultimately guide her into all the truth.

I know that man's whole nature is affected by the hereditary taint of sin : his "mind and conscience is defiled ;" but this is true of his affections and emotions, no less than of his intellect. He does not, of himself, "approve those things that are excellent." But the Holy Spirit can "sanctify" man "wholly"—body, soul, and spirit—and can enable the spirit of man to comprehend the things of the Spirit of God—a "thing

which by nature he cannot" do. Instead, therefore, of opposing Reason to Revelation, let us humbly recognize that Reason is now the principal avenue through which God's revelation comes to His Church. For, when all has been said, what is Reason? Is it not that "right judgment in all things" for which we pray; a judgment which enables us to observe *proportion* and to perceive *analogy*, wherever analogy exists, and wherever proportion should be found. It has well been said that "Satan is intellect without God;" but the sanctified reason of the man whose will is in harmony with God's Will is in its proper measure a manifestation of the mind of God.

### III

It is a Rabbinic belief that the nation of Israel was specially created in order to observe the Sabbath day; but our Lord said that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." As man was before the Sabbath, so the Church was before the Bible. The Church is the Divinely constituted witness of the Incarnation and the Resurrection; and these things would have been none the less facts if the Bible had never been written. Many people tremble lest, if the genuineness of the Gospels be disproved, the belief in Christianity should have to be given up. The value of the Gospels as the testimony

of eye-witnesses is indeed incalculable ; but if it should turn out that these writings are only collections of what was most surely believed amongst Christians in the sub-Apostolic age, would this fact be tantamount to the proof that the Son of God never became man ; that Jesus Christ was never "crucified, dead, and buried," and that He never "rose again the third day" ? Does the credibility of these facts depend upon the accident of their having been recorded by contemporary eye-witnesses in a set history ? A little consideration will show that it does not. The world would have been "turned upside down" if the Gospels had never been written, and St. Paul would have carried Christianity to "the utmost bounds of the West" if he had never put pen to paper in a Roman dungeon. "The things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." This was the charge laid upon Timothy (2 Tim. ii. 2). When doubt arose in the early Church, the bishops did not appeal so much to the Apostolic writings as to the traditions which had been committed to them. The Church was, in fact, forced to be a secret society, so that even the baptismal creed was not divulged to outsiders, and the copies of the sacred books were few in number and liable at any moment to be seized and burnt. But the art of writing was not so important then as it is now, in that, before it became general, the power of memory was much greater. Thus the Vedas were



handed down by memory for hundreds, not to say thousands of years ; and the teaching of Buddha was not committed to writing until long after his death. It might have pleased God that the history of Jesus Christ should have been written only in the memories and lives of His followers. The institution of a visible Church—meaning thereby “the blessed company of all faithful people”—“epistles known and read of all men”—was, next to that of His own Son, His greatest gift to a perishing world.

It was once believed that the Bible was an inexhaustible storehouse of every kind of knowledge, and that there was no question within the whole range of human experience to which it did not furnish an authoritative answer. Thus, for a long time the use of chloroform was condemned as impious ; but its lawfulness was finally conceded on the strength of the text, “The Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam.” In like manner, the existence of the Antipodes was disproved by the text, “Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him.” But the misery of it was that any opinion, no matter what the subject, which happened to contravene the traditional interpretation, was thought to call for condign punishment. The single text, “Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in,” sent multitudes to the dungeon or to the stake. So much error and misery resulted from the misuse of Scripture that we need not wonder that it played the principal part in



two out of the three temptations of our Lord. For centuries the use of the Bible in the hands of ecclesiastics was a curse and not a blessing to the greater part of Christendom, and not until the laity obtained the boon of an open Bible did the Truth have free course.

Formerly the Canon, or measuring *rule* of the Church, was a procrustean bed, but it has now become a thing of marvellous elasticity. Accommodators of Scripture have little difficulty in showing that the Bible and modern science mean the same thing. Some even maintain that organic evolution is taught by the words which they render, "Let Us make man *into* Our image." "Tell us your facts," say these harmonizers, "and we will show them to you in the Bible." The ancients had just as little difficulty in finding the teachings of their philosophy in the myths of their early poets. But the pity of it is, that when science makes a false step in the twilight, as she sometimes does, accommodators are quite sure that Scripture teaches the same thing. In this way the Bible comes by more harm from the ill-judged defence of friends than from the malicious attacks of enemies. Indeed, much that passes for the latter is, in reality, only a plea for a higher conception of God and of His modes of operation. There is "much rubbish" (Neh. ix. 10) encumbering the temple courts, and the preliminary labour of clearing it away is often mistaken for a hostile attempt to dig up the foundations.

But is this critical attitude towards the Bible

lawful and honest on the part of those who are admitted to Holy Orders in the Established Church of the nation only on the express declaration that they "unfeignedly believe all the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament"? Yes; unfeignedly—that is, without any pretence—we believe all the Canonical Scriptures, but *understood in the sense in which we believe God now intends them to be understood*. We are not tied down to the traditional, or to any other system of interpretation. The word of God is "quick," *i.e.* living: it grows and expands, and therefore, in a sense, the burden of its message changes. As the Church long ago ceased to apply the religious romances of the Apocrypha (though part of Holy Scripture) "to establish any doctrine," so we no longer apply the myths and legends of Holy Scripture to establish any fact, historical or scientific. We are "persuaded that the Holy Scriptures contain sufficiently all doctrine required of necessity for eternal salvation," and that "both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ." That is the main point. We are not concerned to inquire what was the intention of the framers of the Ordinal.<sup>1</sup> The question must be understood in the light of all that God has since revealed to His Church, and as it is now generally understood by those "who have public authority given

<sup>1</sup> The question may have been directed against those who denied that certain books of the Bible were rightly included in the Canon.

to them in the Congregation, to call and send Ministers into the Lord's vineyard."

It is often said that our Blessed Lord endorsed in His Own Person the Jewish estimate of the Hebrew Scriptures. If this were so, we should find ourselves *committed to the Verbal Inspiration* of Holy Scripture. This is a fact which has not received the attention it deserves. Many in the early Church took over this extreme view from the Jews.<sup>1</sup> Athenagoras, for instance, in the second century said that "the Spirit of God moved the lips of the prophets as mere machines, using them as a piper blows his pipe." Thus our "fathers ate sour grapes, and the teeth" of us their "children have been set on edge." When we are encountered by a real or imaginary array of manifest discrepancies and intrinsic improbabilities, and when no amount of "prayer and fasting" will drive "this kind" of devil out, we feel sorely tempted to throw over the credibility of the Gospels, and even to give up Christ, if that were possible. What is the cause of this unspeakable distress? It is not "blind unbelief," as we are apt to charge against ourselves, but simply the inability to disburden our minds of the effects of a long training in the belief of the verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture. We forget that no story is more liable to variations of detail than a true story told

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<sup>1</sup> The Orthodox Jews still retain the same irrational view. They say that the Rabbinical author of one of their holiest books simply adjured his pen, which wrote of itself as he held it in his hand.

often by different people. We ignore the fact that the Evangelists wrote many years after the event; that they had to select their information from a great body of tradition, and that in their narratives there would naturally be a certain amount of syncretism, both of conversations and of events. We make no allowance for the "personal equation," and we leave out of count their separate aims and their independent points of view. It will be much to be thankful for if a more scientific view of Inspiration should enable us to perceive that our present difficulties are no difficulties at all. Moses and Elijah may long ago have disappeared in a cloud of myth and legend, but we still see Jesus. We may not see Him in all things exactly as He stood on the Lake of Galilee or in the synagogue of Capernaum, but we see Him as St. Stephen saw Him—on the right hand of God.

## V

### *WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?*

NEARLY all the popular arguments which are brought forward in proof of the truth of Christianity, might be urged with equal force in support of other universal book-religions. Christian Apologists do not sufficiently remember this.

If the Christian points to the New Testament and asks, "How could a tent-maker and a few poor peasants and fishermen of themselves produce so sublime literature?" the Moslem answers, with regard to his Koran, "How could a poor camel-driver, who could neither read nor write, do the same?"

If the Christian urges the fulfilment in the New Testament of direct predictions in the Old, the Moslem replies that the Gospel itself foretold Mohammed.

If the Christian insists that the doctrine of the Trinity is the bedrock of Christian morality, the Moslem retorts that the Mohammedan Unity was a necessary corrective of Christian practice in the worship of relics, images, and saints.

It is as mistaken as it is dishonest to claim for Christianity as a Revealed Religion all the benefits

which belong really to Natural Religion, and at the same time to be blind to the good which exists in other religions as well as in our own.

Mohammedanism answers the highest purposes of religion from the standpoint of utility. Its precepts, when carried out, effectually promote righteousness and resignation. Within its ample pale all men are equal, and all men are brethren. No honest Moslem, however poor or humble, ever despises himself or is despised by others because he is not a gentleman. A Moslem prince would think it no shame to marry the virtuous daughter of an industrious peasant ; but in a Christian aristocracy the taint of such a marriage would not be wiped out in three generations. And as Mohammedanism knows no distinction of birth, so it knows also no distinction of race or colour. In some Christian states a man of colour, although a Christian and a Communicant, is not allowed to walk on the pavement, nor to eat or worship in company with white men. In no Mohammedan country is there anything to prevent a Moslem negro of surpassing intelligence standing next to the throne. Hence it is frequently noticed that converts from heathenism to Islam have a self-confidence and an independent bearing which are largely wanting in converts to Christianity from the same tribe.

Mohammedanism perfects man as a rational being, and it produces some saints. It inspires no morbid self-contempt. It prescribes no unnatural virtues. It

imposes no unwholesome restrictions, and it has not reduced a life of shame to a system. It promotes general happiness, and it discourages the unrest which disquiets Western nations. When it fails—and fail it often does—it is said to be because Western vices have corrupted the native simplicity.

*In this admission lies the condemnation of Mohammedanism.* Any religion which cannot stand when brought into contact with the highest civilization, must ultimately perish. Pure Mohammedanism is better than corrupt Christianity, and corrupt Christianity can be very corrupt; for “the corruption of the best is the worst.” But pure Christianity can raise a man out of the most degrading circumstances;<sup>1</sup> it perfects the character under every lawful condition of life, and it is the only religion which flourishes in the soil of the highest civilization.

And as it is with Mohammedanism, so it is also with most of the religions of the more backward races. As long as the native religion and the native civilization flourish together, the result on the whole is fairly satisfactory from a temporal point of view. The people are tolerably happy, and their numbers increase. But when they come in contact with a much higher form of civilization, the native religion proves utterly inadequate to sustain them in their time of

<sup>1</sup> I heard a Jew, who had been a keeper of a house of infamy, say that when he began to listen out of curiosity to Christian open-air preaching, he very soon felt, “This life will not do for me.”



trial. There is a break-down of national character, often followed by a break-up of the nation or tribe.

On the other hand, the Christianity of the Gospel does enable even the weaker races to emerge successfully from the struggle for existence under the trying conditions introduced by modern civilization. Wherein does the "great strength" of Christianity lie?

To a man of the world, living without God, but well informed on scientific matters, it seems quite possible that the thinking and willing force in man—his mind or spirit—is identical with the force that reveals itself in light or heat, matter and spirit being but two forms, or two aspects, of one single reality, the fundamental substance, which is the sole reality that exists. To the same man, as a student of folklore, it seems equally possible that the Christian form of religion is but the most beautiful presentment of that primitive superstition which has its foundation in the belief that every inexplicable or strange phenomenon has for its cause a spiritual agent. Having reached the conviction that the hypothesis of a personal God is no longer necessary for the explanation of the universe, he is necessarily doubtful of the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is not insensible of the unspeakable comfort which sincere believers derive from their religion; but he knows, from the law of supply and demand in nature, that the sense of pain and loss may have created the consolations of religion. He remembers, it may be, his own delight when

to him God was only just behind the bright clouds above him; and he sighs as he thinks of the happy time when to his childish mind the existence of fairies and giants was as great a reality. He is conversant with many saintly Christian lives, but he knows that Christianity has not a monopoly of saintliness, and he doubts whether the Christian ideal, with its standard of chastity and rectitude, its self-renunciation and altruism, be not somewhat quixotic in a world where it has been by a ruthless struggle for existence that the fittest has survived. He is acquainted with the many beauties of the New Testament, but he doubts if there be any passage so beautiful that a parallel cannot be found in some so-called uninspired heathen writer.<sup>1</sup> He admits that the personality of Christ, as portrayed in the Gospels, is in some respects unique, but he maintains that in the course of ten thousand years the human race might well produce more than one unique personality. Moreover, in view of the doubts amongst professed theologians regarding the genuineness and authenticity of the Gospels in whole or in part, he is unable to say how much of the portraiture of Christ may not be due to the idealization of His life and character. Amidst the rival claims of Churches, non-Christian as well as Christian, he refuses to submit his reason to the rule of authority, as destructive of individual freedom and

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.* "I have not forced a labouring man to do more than his daily task,"—From the profession of rectitude in *The Book of the Dead*.

responsibility ; and the more so as he is aware that error in the past has never been slow to shelter itself behind authority. He does not deny the marvellous change of character which Christianity frequently works, which we ascribe to the agency of the Holy Spirit ; but he knows also how powerful the sudden grasping of a new idea may be, and how great may be the personal magnetism of a stronger mind, quite apart from the question of truth. He sees young men at the Universities living profane, intemperate, and sometimes impure lives, who, after a year's special training, become to all appearance enthusiastic, earnest ministers of the Gospel, and he says, "Is there any objective truth in Christianity? Is there one little grain of corn that will grow in the whole heap of chaff?"

There is at least one fact which such an one will not deny. He is not as good as he might be. Probably he is not as good as he would like to be. If by any chance this knowledge weighs heavily on his mind ; if it should take the form of a sense of sin, it will come to him as "good news" that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." Christianity does not commend itself—it does not even address itself—to all mankind ; but only to those "who are grieved and wearied with the burden of" their "sins." "He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away." The hungry soul has only to "taste and see," and then it *knows*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The mother of a Thug told her son that the goddess was angry,

This is the secret of the success of Christianity. It is the unique truth about which all heathen scriptures are silent; it is the simple Gospel message, that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This is Christianity: "all else is commentary." The proclamation of this truth is the best Apologetic:<sup>1</sup> few other lines of argument can do more than show that the objections which are thought to be fatal to the claims of Christianity are not really so. They may win a hearing for the Gospel; but they often leave the head convinced, and the heart untouched.

There is no lack of preachers of Altruism amongst "all sorts and conditions" of thinkers; "but the word preached does not profit, not being" accompanied by any adequate demonstration of its reasonableness. Urge the claims of Posterity upon the selfish man, and he answers, "What has Posterity done for me?" Tell the savage to love his enemy, and he answers, "Yes, when I have killed and roasted him." Tell

and that he must kill a man as a sacrifice that very night. After a long search, unable to find any one, he killed his own little brother; and for years afterwards he was haunted by the memory of the child's screams. After he had heard and embraced the message of the Gospel, he said, "I have at last found a pillow on which I can lay my head in peace."

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. F. G. Kleinhenn told me that a bitter Rabbinic Jew once called on him to vent his rage against Christianity. After giving him a simple exposition of this verse, the missionary asked him, "Now, what are your objections?" The other answered, "I have none; you have anticipated them all!"

the trader to love his neighbour as himself, and he answers, "Why should I? I sell him nothing, and he has nothing I want to buy. Besides, he has not even a vote." Tell Dives that Lazarus is his brother, and he answers, "I would not touch such carrion with my stick." Tell the scientist that all mankind are one family, and he answers, "No, not one family, but one species. All are descended from the same ape-like ancestors; all come ultimately from the same mud-pond. But what of that? Weak animals, like rooks and wolves, are doubtless wise in sinking the interest of the individual in that of the community; but strong animals, like eagles and lions, stand alone. It is true they are not very numerous; but did not your wisest saw-maker declare, 'One man among a thousand have I found'? The race has been developed for the sake of its best specimens. The fittest, not the failures, shall inherit the earth."

And yet the preachers of Altruism preach on; to some amiable individuals the idea has become an all-engrossing hobby. But I doubt whether the world would have heard the word, or would have seen very much of the thing, if modern thought had not been leavened with the truth, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son."

The foregoing considerations enable us to see the reason, as well as the obligation, of the Divine command, to "go into all the world," and "make disciples of all the nations." Nations which "believe,"

like individuals, will "not perish." They will live on. A quarter of a century ago it was clearly foreseen what Japan would become, because she had then set her face to imbibe the spirit of Christianity. When first she began to reckon time by weeks, and thus in some sense to mark the Seventh Day Rest, an American writer declared that a new nation had been born. But no one can say—except as a matter of faith—whether China will be more than a geographical name a hundred years hence, because her final attitude towards Christianity is still hanging in the balance.

The popular arguments for Christianity are very weak, the popular objections against it are very strong; for both alike are "rooted and grounded in" prejudice: but the preaching of Christ crucified is now, as it has been ever, "the power of God and the wisdom of God." "He filleth the hungry soul with goodness;" and the soul that is "athirst for God" He satisfies with Himself.

THE END

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